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## VA Makes National Headlines



Betty Bolin Brown  
Acting Director

When I arrived to Dallas in January, I knew there were immediate challenges to address. Other staff within VA joined us to help identify areas for improvement and offer solutions, and great strides have been made to align us more within national standards and requirements. I have come to depend on the dedication of our employees and their willingness to pitch in and help where they can. We're in the hot seat now, and it's going to take all of us working together to turn this around. It encourages me to see employees smiling and speaking to our veterans. Your friendly greeting can go a long way to brighten their day and assure them that providing the best quality care is everybody's priority.

VA nationally has been on the front pages of newspapers and trade journals around the country leading the effort in quality patient care. Below is an excerpt from the January/February 2005 issue of *Washington Monthly* featured on the cover.

"Veterans groups tenaciously defend the VHA and applaud its turnaround. 'The quality of care is outstanding,' says Peter Gayton, deputy director for veterans affairs and rehabilitation at the American Legion. In the latest independent survey, 81 percent of VHA hospital patients express satisfaction with the care they receive, compared to 77 percent of Medicare and Medicaid patients. Outside experts agree that the VHA has become an industry leader in its safety and quality measures. Dr. Donald M. Berwick, president of the Institute for Health Care Improvement and one of the nation's top health-care quality experts, praises the VHA's information technology as 'spectacular.' The venerable Institute of Medicine notes that the VHA's 'integrated health information system, including its framework for using performance measures to improve quality, is considered one of the best in the nation.'"

The January-April 2005 issue of *Army Echoes* states that "Patients in the VA health care system receive significantly better care than private-sector patients, according to a recently released independent study. The study by RAND, an independent think-tank, found that VA patients were significantly more likely than non-VA patients to receive needed preventative care. The study also found that VA patients with chronic medical problems received the treatment they needed more often than private-sector patients."



The Honorable R. James "Jim" Nicholson  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Mr. Nicholson was nominated by President George W. Bush to serve as VA Secretary on December 9, 2004, and was unanimously confirmed by the Senate on January 26, 2005, and was sworn into office on February 1, 2005.

Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin was appointed Acting Under Secretary for Health in the Department of Veterans Affairs on April 6, 2004. Nominated by President Bush on February 18, 2005, his nomination is waiting Senate confirmation.







## VA Puts Patient Safety First

VA has successfully made patient safety part of its culture. In 1998, VA created the National Center for Patient Safety (NCPS) to lead and integrate patient safety efforts for the department. Dr. James Bagian, director of NCPS, came to VA with significant experience having served as a NASA physician and astronaut, an Air Force flight surgeon and an investigator for both the Challenger and Columbia space shuttle accidents.

VA sets the bar for patient safety and has been recognized nationally for its achievements. But patients also play a vital role in their safety. NCPS offers the following tips on how people should work with their provider to improve patient safety.

- When you receive a prescription, make sure you know what the medication is for and what possible side effects it might have.
- Make sure your doctor knows what allergies or adverse reactions you have had to past medicines.
- If you have a test, don't assume no news is good news. Ask about the results. If something doesn't seem right, call it to the attention of your doctor.
- Make sure your doctor knows about all medications you are taking. This includes prescription, over-the-counter medications, and dietary supplements such as vitamins and herbs.
- Write down questions for the doctor prior to the appointment and consider bringing a friend or family member with you. It's your health. If you have questions, ask them.

VA is proud of its achievements in patient safety. For example:

- VA pioneered the computer patient record system making patient's medical records easier to share among patients' physicians.
- VA instituted the bar code medication administration system, which helps ensure the right medication is given to the right patient at the right time.
- VA developed the Ensuring Correct Surgery Directive, a pioneering work, based on a straight-forward, five-step system that addresses incorrect surgical and invasive procedures, and has served as a basis for national and international guidelines.
- A leader in patient safety training, VA has offered training seminars for more than 1,000 VA healthcare professionals at locations around the country and welcomed participants from outside VA and from around the world. VA was selected by the Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to formulate, manage and implement a multifaceted patient safety training program for state health officials and their selected hospital partners. Its purpose is to improve patient safety nationwide.

For more information on patient safety at VANTHCS, contact Lee Lewis in Clinical Quality Management Service at extension 70417.

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## A Look at Women Veterans

Women veterans are one of the fastest growing segments of the veteran population. There are approximately 1.7 million women veterans. They comprise 6.5 percent of the total veteran population and 6 percent of all veterans who use VA health care services. VA estimates that by 2010 women veterans will comprise 10 percent of veterans using VA health care services. Last year, VANTHCS established a Well Women's Clinic at Dallas where four female providers have capacity to see 48 patients per clinic, offering primary care services to female veterans. For more information or questions about women veterans at Dallas, contact Women Veterans Program Manager Dr. Cheryl Sampson at extension 71919. At Bonham, contact Euna Wright, RN, at extension 36224.

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# ★★★★★ *We Do Make A Difference* ★★★★★

"I have been a patient here for 2 weeks. I have received excellent service here from all the nurses and others have been kind and courteous to me. I have only good things to say about the services I have received. I thank God for this wonderful VA Hospital and I thank you."

K. Cooper

"I am so pleased with the care and services I receive from the VA Hospital in Dallas. The service VA provides is more satisfactory than private care I received in the past."

C. Wanner

"My wife and I wish to thank you for your courteous attention to our request for enrollment this afternoon. I have had contact with VA departments here, in West Palm Beach, Florida, and Washington, and you were friendly, inviting and obviously well versed in the computer program (which speaks well both for you and for the programmer). Your efforts to speed us through the intricacies of enrollment cut many minutes off the time needed and were greatly appreciated."

C. Hanna

"I would like to take time to say I have never had better medical care anywhere than at VA. I spent 22 years working in a hospital ... always choose to have any problems taken care of at a VA Hospital."

R. Blackwell

"In light of all the most recent negative things that the news media and other sources have bombarded this hospital with, I would like to let you know that my life has been changed by the efforts and resources that have been directed towards the drug rehab and homeless domiciliary programs. I entered the VA Hospital approximately one year ago at night to the emergency station. I was broken spiritually, physically and socially. I was accepted in the Homeless Domiciliary here in Dallas. The staff (all of them) put their tools of knowledge and wisdom to work to put back together a life that I had for a long time worked so hard to tear apart. Now I'm in my own apartment and working with self-esteem and hope for a better future. I just hope that this small note of praise touches you to let you know that the work that's being done through the VA Administration and staff is truly effecting and changing lives. The lives of vets who have in past times put their lives on the line for our country and what the United States stands for."

T. Oliver

Watch for Venture monthly,  
and send news or story  
ideas to Penny Kerby in  
Public Affairs.



Have you looked at the  
intranet lately? It is full of  
great information and  
feature items.

Dallas VA Medical Center  
4500 S. Lancaster Rd.  
Dallas, TX 75216  
214 742-8387

Fort Worth Outpatient Clinic  
300 W. Rosedale  
Fort Worth, TX 76104  
817 335-2202

Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center  
1201 E. Ninth St.  
Bonham, TX 75418  
903 583-2111